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How U.S. Protects Secrets in Moscow

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MOSCOW, March 2 — hen the political section the U.S. embassy here as remodeled last year, avy Seabees turned up ores of Soviet listening de- ces — 11 in one room one — embedded in the alls and ceilings.

Although the bugs were longer functioning by the ne they were found, a list "security reminders" nded out to Americans ll says, "Assume all rooms ve electronic eavesdrop- ng equipment and that all nversations will be moni- red." The warning flatly ates that all telephone lls are tapped by the Sovi- s.

Keeping American secrets om the Kremlin is clearly major concern for the U.S. mbassy in Moscow. Large rts of the embassy resem- e a bunker. There are ick vault-like doors and mbination locks every- here. Sensitive discussions e confined to a plastic ibble set on a raised floor one room with walls said be lined with lead.

Russians who clean the of- ces must be accompanied y Marine guards. And So- iet-supplied drivers are as- umed to understand Eng- sh with the purpose of reporting all conversa- ions." All these precautions — and a good many more — re under the supervision of publicity-shy security atta- he and his full-time staff of t least three people.

Interest in Kremlin sur- eillance of official Ameri- ans — and U.S. efforts to keep tabs on the Russians — has been revived again by reports of potentially haz- ardous radiation in the em- bassy building, said to be caused by Soviet microwave devices focused on impor- tant areas of the 10-story structure.

Some reports say the pur- pose of the long-distance rays is to energize Soviet bugs in place; others say that the function is to jam American listening equip- ment trained on the Krem- lin. And the public Soviet line is that the embassy is producing its own radiation with a wide array of elec- tronic apparatus.

In any case, the embassy has installed wire mesh or plastic covers on many of the windows, which appar- ently block the rays. But most of those windows had already been frosted over to keep anyone from using a telescope to look in, and cur- tains are usually drawn for yet another layer of protec- tion.

Unlike U.S. embassies in many other countries, the main problem here is not the danger of terrorist at- tack. Teams of burly Rus- sian militiamen guard all entryways and demand the papers of anyone they do not recognize. Regularly, Russians seeking access to the consular section are spirited away for interroga- tion at a shack around the corner.

(To discourage this, the embassy recently installed on the building facade, a closed-circuit television that is watched inside.)

A decade ago, the em- bassy was besieged twice by 2,000 Asian students protest- ing U.S. bombing of North Vietnam, but in these quieter times, the building's living quarters and public areas such as the dispensary and snack bar seem no more closely supervised than simi- lar American facilities else- where abroad.

The administrative, consu- lar and parts of the cultural section are located on the ground floor, and access, once past the militiamen, is not restricted. There are apartments on the next few floors, mostly housing secre- taries and communication workers. The entrance to the secure area is on the ninth floor: a Marine is sta- toned there at all times.

This section of the build- ing, extending four floors up and down, is a maze of nar- row corridors and small of- fices. Ambassador Walter J. Stoessel has only a tiny win- dow, and aides say his desk has been moved away from it since the radiation scare began. Lower-ranking politi- cal officers are required to lock their doors whenever they leave the room, unless classified papers are filed away in a safe. And all visi- tors must be escorted in and out.

These procedures are by no means unique to the Mos- cow embassy. The difference here is the presumption that the Soviets are always watching. "Assume that any luggage or briefcases in your rooms will be searched while you are absent," says the standard security warn- ing for American visitors. "Assume all trash thrown in wastebaskets will be exam- ined."

The embassy building, lo- cated on broad Chaikowsky Boulevard on the edge of Moscow's downtown area, was constructed by the Sovi- ets after World War II, and Americans believe that spe- cial provisions were made from the outset for main- taining surveillance. The most celebrated case of eavesdropping was the bug discovered in the Great Seal of the United States hang- ing on the ambassador's wall in 1960.

To prevent, or at least dis- courage, a repetition, regu- lar debugging sweeps are made. Some offices, it said, are also equipped with jam- mers that emit inaudible frequencies. But despite all that, any conversation out- side the room with the plas- tic dome is not regarded as secure.

There are plans now for a new $100 million U.S. em- bassy in Moscow. Unlike its predecessor, this one is U.S.- designed — with maximum bugfree security in mind.